

NACHO-FLAVORED

# FREAKS

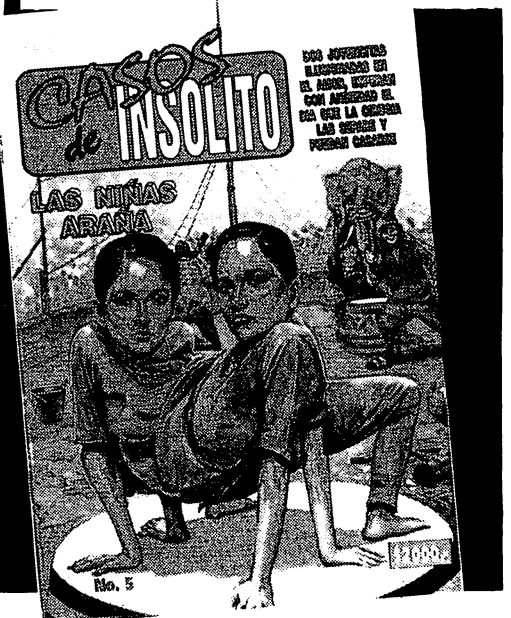
WOULD YOU BELIEVE... MEXICAN DEFORMITY COMICS?



Whether you admit it or not, we all like to stare at freaks...and stare at them...and keep staring.

Staring at a freak, the observer is preconsciously grateful that nature didn't render him a distended, platypuslike, deoxyribonucleic accident. After gawking at elephant people, one's knobby knees or mild acne don't seem all that bad. Freaks sit at the edge of the cosmic dough slab, lumpy globs which missed the graceful sculpting of God's cookie-cutter.

Nature's nice, I guess, but it truly springs to life only when it fucks up royally. When sex and violence no longer excite, biological mishaps take up the slack. Multiple orgasms? See you later. Multiple murder? I'll call you sometime. A man with multiple limbs sprouting from his chest? WHERE? WHERE?!? As far as grabbing one's attention goes, the norm is never as effective as the aberration. Maybe I'm not the typical American male, but I'd rather look at a two-headed ogress than at Cindy



Crawford. The generally accepted physical ideal is coldly intangible, almost a mathematical abstraction. Do we really want a world of flawless humans, as well-shapen and indistinguishable from one another as shampoo bottles in a drugstore? A perfectly formed body is about as useless as a carefree, happy life.

What dicks we Americans are. What turgid, toothless printed matter we crank out. On a purely literary level, the Mexicans whip our asses raw, *vato*. Already the world's preeminent publishers by dint of their gore mags, Mexico's pulp wizards have recently coughed up



deformity comics, a concept as obvious but unexpected as a ring-tailed wolf-boy at a shopping mall.

The series is called *Casos de Insolito* (*Unusual Cases*), and it's a full-color fiesta of chromosomal calamity. Each edition is dedicated to a single real-life case of human disfigurement. *ANSWER Me!* was lucky enough to get its paws on the first five issues, which follow the malformed odysseys of: a four-armed Hindu street person; a limbless would-be football player; a bedridden thousand-pound man; and two different sets of sexy Siamese sisters. In the game of hereditary Lotto, these are players who didn't get any of the six numbers right.

*Casos* stories are culled from tabloid items in its mother-ship publication, *Semanario de lo Insolito* (roughly, *Weirdness Weekly*), a glossy, south-of-the-border analogue to the *Weekly World News*. A nacho-flavored testament to the glories of frazzled DNA, *Semanario* keeps the public happy, be it with bread, circuses, or juicy horror tales such as *ILE QUEMO*

*SUS PARTES PRIVADAS CON ACIDO!* (*THEY BURNT HER PRIVATE PARTS WITH ACID!*) There are the typical pieces one might expect in this sort of rag, such as nudist church ceremonies, sidewalk levitationists, and the world's largest potato, but there's a strong focus on human freaks. The ugly, the bloated, and the hopelessly contorted adorn nearly every page.

In the comic-format *Casos*, instead of characters who can stop oncoming trains and leap tall buildings in a single bound, these superheroes have trouble getting out of bed. Instead of snickering arch-villains, they do battle with cruel genetic blows. Though impaled on the black humor of the ontological prong, they wriggle with all their energy to lead meaningful lives. Belittled and spat upon, they endure the slack-jawed stares and bullying taunts of rude normals. Earnest family members nudge them along in their wormlike struggle to achieve Positive Body Image. They forge ahead like most of us, although with admittedly higher tailor's bills and some added difficulty in finding dates.

The stories are drawn with Lichtensteinian rigidity and are presented without the knowing smirk of *norteamericano* art jockeys. The creators' intentions seem sincere, if a little bent. In keeping with the conservative tone, they trot out that tired literary workhorse known as The Indomitable Human Spirit. With the exception of *The World's Fattest Man*, who is shown sealed in a Buick-sized casket in the final frame, most of these tales have an uplifting, humanistic denouement. The narrative burrito is stuffed with pathos, and the effect is that of a Chaplin movie if the Little Tramp had been a thalidomide baby. Protagonists hobble off into the sunset, physically mangled but spiritually whole. We are ceaselessly reminded that while these folks may be genetic roadkill, their souls are no different than ours. The publishers cloyingly attempt to strum our heartstrings, to ram home the notion that these are people, too. No shit, but if they weren't limbless or joined at the hip, we wouldn't be interested in 'em! ■

